

Testimony from Carole Wallin, Deputy Superintendent of Education,
Louisiana State Department of Education

State Superintendent Cecil Picard is unable to meet with you today so on his behalf I want to thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today.

As all of us work frantically to get our schools repaired, our students accounted for and registered, principals, teachers, and support workers recruited and hired, it is difficult to think back eleven months ago to the destructive hurricanes that ravaged our districts, wiped out our neighborhoods and communities and changed forever the lives of many of our citizens.

The first few weeks and months after the storms we focused on finding schools for our displaced children, which we believed would provide much needed stability and structure to their lives, and helping our displaced teachers and educators find jobs.

Not surprising, the education community, in Louisiana and across the country opened their hearts and their arms to our children, their families and our educators.

They did not ask how they would pay for opening additional schools, hiring additional teachers, buying more books and desks, providing transportation and food...they just took our kids in and gave them a place that was safe and a place to learn, while adults worked out the other details.

I remember talking to the state superintendent from Alabama, Joe Morton, and the superintendents from Mississippi and Texas and Florida as soon as we had phone service and the first things they said to us was, "we are not concerned about records and information...we are taking in the kids".

Our first estimates showed us that 72,000 Louisiana students were displaced in 48 states, with the bulk of them in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas. There were 42,000 students displaced to other districts within Louisiana. Six months later we still had 65,000 students displaced in other states. And 35,000 remain displaced throughout Louisiana.

The steadfast support we received from our two Senators: Senator Landrieu, Senator Vitter and their staffs along with the rest of our Louisiana Delegation has been crucial to the work that we have are doing. They have remained in constant contact with us and helped us navigate through the uncharted waters of federal agencies we are not accustomed to working with. They have never turned down a request for assistance and we have had many. We will never forget their assistance and advice and the time they have spent working for us.

We are accustomed to working with Department of Education and we have received tremendous support through the leadership of Secretary Spellings and her staff.

Her appointment of Henry Johnson, a long time friend and colleague of the State Superintendent, as her personal liason to our agency, her announcement in December awarding \$20 million dollars for the support and start up of charter schools, and the department's support of the Hurricane Education Recovery Act funds have been so important to us.

I would like to give you a brief statewide overview of the impact of the Hurricane Education Recovery Act funds for Louisiana: as you know HERA funds are made up of three pots of money: Impact Aid for Displaced Students, The Assistance for Homeless Youth, and the Restart School Operations Program.

IMPACT AID FOR DISPLACED STUDENTS PROGRAM

- Louisiana has to date awarded to school districts and non public schools a total \$197 million.
- \$174. million to public school districts and \$22.9 million to nonpublic schools affected by the storms.
- Another \$15 million is currently being processed for release to increase the per pupil amounts to \$1,095 for regular education and \$1,369 for special education
- On average, for each quarter of the year, public school districts reported approximately 41,658 regular education and special education students.
- All 68 public school systems had displaced students.

Funds to Public School Systems:

- Of the \$174.1 million dollars...\$73.6 million or 42% of the funds has been allocated to public schools in the New Orleans metropolitan area:
- Recovery School district 1.7 million
- Orleans 12.6 million
- Jefferson 36 million
- Plaquemines 3.1 million
- St. Bernard 4.3 million
- St. Tammany 15.9 million

Funds to nonpublic schools:

- Non public schools reported an average of 6,611 regular and special education students per each quarter this year,
- A total of \$22.9 million has been awarded to nonpublic schools affected by the hurricanes.
- Approximately \$12.6 million or 55% of these funds are going to schools in the greater New Orleans area,

Use of funds

- School districts and schools may use these funds for operational expenditures to support activities related to both displaced and non-displaced students.
- Some examples of the how these monies are being used include salaries in schools enrolling displaced students, curricular material and classroom supplies, basic instructional services and reasonable transportation costs.

ASSISTANCE TO HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAM

- Louisiana has awarded \$1.5 million to assist with homeless youth,
- All students displaced because of the storms were eligible for these funds,
- These monies were allocated to 68 schools systems and 13 charter and lab schools
- These funds have just recently gone out and districts are writing plans on how funds will be expended.

Use of funds

- These funds are being used for identification of displaced students, enrollment assistance, supplies, and assessment and school placement assistance.

RESTART SCHOOL OPERATIONS PROGRAM

- Louisiana was awarded a total of \$445 million in Restart funds,
- A total of \$245.6 million has been awarded to public and non public school districts at this time,

Public School Funds:

- \$186.4 million of 90% of these funds has been allocated to schools in the New Orleans metropolitan area:
- Recovery School District 121.7 million
- Orleans 12.5 million
- Jefferson 13.3 million
- Plaquemines 7.3 million
- St. Bernard 20.6 million
- St Tammany 11 million,

Nonpublic school funds:

- A total of 37.9 million has been awarded to nonpublic schools affected by the hurricanes.
- Approximately 34 million or 97% of these funds are being provided to schools in the greater New Orleans area.

Remaining Restart Funds

- We are currently developing criteria to allocate the remaining \$193.5 million,
- Our goal is to gather data to ensure we identify and target those schools and districts that were hardest hit by the storms and will need the most help in recovery.

Challenges and solutions

- We have been faced with a number of challenges in administering this program.
- Gathering detailed information on the devastation has delayed the allocation of these funds,
- School Districts and schools were struggling even 4 and 5 months after the storms to grasp the enormity of the devastation and quantify it,
- Assessments of the damages were slow and time consuming,
- And, competing priorities added to the delays in identifying needs,

- Getting schools open and serving students were foremost on their minds,
- Providing services to the nonpublic schools has also been a challenge for us,
- The law requires that all services be provided by a public entity,
- Local school districts face their own struggles and taking on the task for the nonpublic schools would have problematic and slowed down their progress as well,
- So we believed the solution was for the state to take on the administrative role for all nonpublic schools and their allocated funds.
- We took this on in the midst of state mid-year budget cuts and a loss of agency positions ...but we felt it was the right thing to do.

Use of the funds

- School Districts have primarily used these monies for operating expenses that are allowable under the law i.e. the local portion of salary and benefits, supplies and equipment, and purchased services,
- This has freed general funds dollars that can now be used for repairs and renovations.
- Nonpublic schools have primarily used these monies to replace instructional supplies and equipment lost from the storms.

As you drive along our gulf coast or make your way through our cities and communities impacted by the storms you know we have miles to go and promises to keep.

But, we remain determined and focused on our efforts to assist our districts and schools across this state in recovery and rebuilding in a manner that will provide our children with better opportunities for an education they need and deserve.